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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Assassination of Former Lebanese PM Hariri

Key stories in the media:

The newspapers -- except Ha'aretz (English Ed.) -- banner either threats against PM Sharon or the assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafiq Hariri in Beirut Monday.

Maariv banners a call by Sharon's secretary, Mirit Danon: "Wake Up." Danon, who has been in the employ of Israeli PMs since Yitzhak Shamir, warns that the threats against Sharon's life are exactly like those against Yitzhak Rabin before his assassination. All media reported that PM Sharon told the Likud's Knesset faction Monday that he has hired guards to protect his late wife's grave, on the grounds of his Sycamore Ranch. Sharon also accused the Likud "rebels" of encouraging the threats, but rebel leader Uzi Landau rejected the charge. Leading media quoted Shin Bet sources as saying that the Temple Mount is far more likely to be the target of Jewish extremist attacks than is Sharon. All media reported on demonstrations by 600 settlers, who blocked important junctions in central Israel and around Jerusalem Monday. Ten to thirty thousand demonstrators (reportss vary) protested in the Gaza Strip's Katif Bloc.

Although they do not rule out other possibilities, most media point an accusing finger at Syria for the blast that killed Hariri. The media reported that Syria blamed Israel for the murder. Leading media cited President Bush's condemnation of the killing.

Ha'aretz (banner in English Ed.) says that two decisions -- the evacuation of settlers in the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank, and the route of the separation fence around the Etzion Bloc and the South Hebron hills -- will be brought for cabinet approval at the same time on Sunday, in an effort to neutralize international criticism of the route of the separation fence by coupling it with the decision to evacuate settlements.

All media reported that a disagreement between Israel and the PA is delaying the handover of security responsibility to the Palestinians in Jericho.

Leading media reported that the GOI is considering plans to relocate settlers from Gaza in the Halutza dunes, south of the Strip. Israel Radio also says that the government could build a town ("Gvaot") in the Etzion Bloc. Construction and Housing Minister Yitzhak Herzog (Labor) told the radio this morning that although the government will not prevent evacuees from moving to the places of their choice, it does not intend to build housing beyond the Green Line. Jerusalem Post quoted Yonatan Bassi, head of Disengagement Authority, as saying Monday before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that most settlers have realized that they are "running out of time," and in the past month have had a "significant change" in attitude about making advance arrangements for compensation and alternative residency.

Ha'aretz reported that Palestinian ministries are busy preparing for the post-disengagement era in Gush Katif and the northwest corner of Gaza, planning among other

things for the construction of thousands of apartments in the areas evacuated in Gush Katif, to resettle refugees now living in camps in Gaza. The newspaper also quoted Sharon as saying before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that the government has still not decided whether the houses of settlers evacuated under the disengagement plan will be razed or turned over to the Palestinians.

Ha'aretz quoted U/S of Treasury Stuart Levey, who heads the office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, as saying Monday during a visit to the region that the U.S. hopes that the PA will cooperate with Israel in an effort to halt the flow of money to halt the flow of money to terrorist organizations. Jerusalem Post quoted Levey as saying that Washington is "greatly disappointed" with Syria for failing to take adequate steps to stop the flow of money to terrorist and insurgent organizations.

Jerusalem Post quoted sources in Gaza City as saying that PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) has agreed to unfreeze Hamas funds held in a number of Palestinian banks. The sources said that the decision follows a meeting between Abbas and Hamas leaders last Saturday.

Ha'aretz and Maariv quoted Abbas as saying in an interview with New York Times that he believes the region faces a new era, and that the sides should move to permanent-status talks.

Leading media reported that on Monday Tourism Minister Avraham Hirschson joined American Jewish and Evangelical Christian leaders in calling on President Bush to cancel a travel advisory which encourages Americans to "defer travel" to Israel.

Maariv quoted sources in Amman as saying that Israel has approved the positioning of 1,000 men from the Badr Brigade -- the Jordanian branch of the Palestinian Liberation Army -- in the West Bank after the implementation of the disengagement plan.

Leading media reported that French President Jacques Chirac has turned down a request from FM Silvan Shalom to support placing Hizbullah on the EU's list of terrorist organizations, telling Shalom that the timing was not right for such a move. Ha'aretz quoted Israeli sources as saying that France does not want to strain relations with the group, which is running as a political party in the upcoming Lebanese elections.

Ha'aretz reported that the leaders of the Catholic community in Israel, headed by Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, wrote President Moshe Katsav on Sunday, laying responsibility for the safety of the community on Israel. The appeal comes in the wake on the attacks on Christians in the Galilee village of Maghar.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "It seems that the opponents [of settler evacuation] are better prepared for it than its supporters. The cabinet and Knesset should treat the upcoming period as a state of emergency, for which the necessary legal and operational tools must be prepared."

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "The rampaging right-wing extremists are not demonstrating only against the cabinet ministers, they also chant slogans against the Jewish residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza [i.e. the territories]."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "A policy of support for Israeli-Palestinian peace and for the new PA government cannot be taken seriously when there is a refusal to even recognize, let alone confront, a terrorist group [Hizbullah] that is openly committed to destroying both."

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in Jerusalem Post: "The Saudi regime is spreading a view of terrorism which extols attacks not only on Israel and America, but also on itself."

Block Quotes:

I. "Ready For a State of Emergency"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (February 15): "The cabinet is slated to convene this Sunday for one of its most important, and perhaps even decisive, meetings since the founding of the state. On the agenda will be Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to evacuate all the settlements in the Gaza Strip plus four settlements in the northern West Bank.... These are not normal times. Opponents of the evacuation are determined to sabotage it. For this purpose, they intend to flood the Katif Bloc with their people and spark riots, both there and in many other places throughout the country. They are being helped by the weakness that the authorities have displayed thus far.... The evacuation will be too drawn out, 12 weeks, and too late, by five months. It seems that its opponents are better prepared for it than its supporters. The cabinet and Knesset should treat the upcoming period as a state of emergency, for which the necessary legal and operational tools must be prepared."

II. "Against the Extreme Right Wing"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (February 15): "The unbridled rampage of an unruly group from the extreme right wing that was aimed against cabinet ministers received a great deal of attention in the government compound in Jerusalem.... The rampaging right-wing extremists are not demonstrating only against the cabinet ministers, they also chant slogans against the Jewish residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza [i.e. the territories].... They refuse to accept the policy of restraint that the residents of the Katif Bloc have adopted.... It would be a grave mistake were the government to deal with the extreme right wing and, while so doing, also try to hurt the Jewish residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza. As noted, a clear distinction needs to be drawn between those two groups. With that having been said, Israel should refrain from taking steps that are in violation of the law, since they could damage the democratic portrait of the State of Israel.... Democracy needs to be protected by democratic means, within the boundaries of the written law. That is a rule that must not be broken!"

III. "Europe and Hizbullah"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (February 15): "If Europe cannot recognize that Hizbullah is a terrorist organization, it is hard to take its diplomacy in the nuclear arena seriously either. Europe has been pressing the U.S. to join in this process, but what reason would the U.S. have to join such a feckless policy? Why, for that matter, is Europe not joining in the U.S. approach?.... In any case, a policy of support for Israeli-Palestinian peace and for the new PA government cannot be taken seriously when there is a refusal to even recognize, let alone confront, a terrorist group that is openly committed to destroying both."

IV. "How Saudi Arabia Threatens Itself"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in Jerusalem Post (February 15): "It's a really strange thing. America is supposed to be the land of public relations; yet it is in the Arab world that this art has been most perfectly developed in political terms. Consider, for example, the Saudi government's international conference on counterterrorism held in early February. Saudi Arabia is in an extremely peculiar position on this issue. On the one hand, Riyadh has been a major financier of terrorism and propagandist for the main ideology motivating such behavior. Most of the September 11 hijackers were Saudis. The Saudis have never accepted responsibility for these acts -- which its leaders often claim were a Zionist or American plot -- and it has not taken very effective action to change the situation.... In other words, the Saudi regime is spreading a view of terrorism which extols attacks not only on Israel and America, but also on itself. This type of manipulation fools some people abroad but may ultimately be fatal to a Saudi regime which is inspiring its own would-be gravediggers at home."

12. Assassination of Former Lebanese PM Hariri:

Summary:

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot:

"Those who cooperate with the American CIA or the Israeli Mossad will receive a car bomb. Bashar Assad's crocodile tears won't help."

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "The U.S. must consider using force to deter the Syrian regime. Perhaps that way it will be possible to achieve stability in three bleeding spots in the region: in Iraq, in the Palestinian Authority and in Lebanon."

Syrian and Lebanese affairs expert, Prof. Eyal Zisser, wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Hariri's elimination pulled the rug from under the [Syrians'] key claim justifying the continuation of their presence in Lebanon -- a presence supposed to guarantee continued stability and the upholding of security in that country."

Block Quotes:

I. "Bashar Assad's Crocodile Tears"

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (February 15): "Damascus intelligence refuses to change the operating disk from 20 and 30 years ago, and indeed, this disk bears a simple and catchy message: all those who try and oppose the palace's policy, just as in the days of the late Hafez Assad, will either vanish or be assassinated. Those who cooperate with the American CIA or the Israeli Mossad will receive a car bomb. Bashar Assad's crocodile tears won't help. While he did indeed get ride of his main rival, from all perspectives he is both the main culprit and loser. If the Lebanese economy is damaged, the deep economic crisis in Syria will only worsen. If the internal cease-fire in Lebanon is done away with, then the administration of President Bush and his new allies in the Elysee Palace will not let Bashar continue to run amok in Lebanon.... [Hariri's] assassination is liable to drag Lebanon into a vortex of blood and terror. The question is who will win in the battle for Lebanon's independence: Bashar Assad or the opposition in Beirut. The legacy that Hariri left behind is meant to lead Lebanon to split from Syria and hold separate negotiations with Israel, on condition that this will be within the power of its leaders, and on condition that they survive the brutality of Damascus. In any event, the return of non-quiet to our neighbor in the north will also put Israel on the alert."

II. "Assad Must Be Dealt With"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in Yediot Aharonot (February 15): "The Americans have so far taken a soft position toward the Syrians. While they did send a number of top envoys who passed on the 'absolutely last warning' to Assad, mainly that he get his hands out of Iraq, in practice, Syria's involvement there continues. The efforts of the UN as well, which passed a resolution obligating Syria to remove its army from Lebanon, have not born fruit to this day. The brutal murder of Hariri and Syria's refusal to all international demands do not leave the world many diplomatic choices. The U.S. must consider using force to deter the Syrian regime. Perhaps that way it will be possible to achieve stability in three bleeding spots in the region: in Iraq, in the Palestinian Authority and in Lebanon."

III. "Syria Will Pay the Price"

Syrian and Lebanese affairs expert, Prof. Eyal Zisser, wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 15): "In the past, Syria used to strike at those who dared raise their hands or their voices against it in Lebanon. But these aren't ordinary working days for Damascus. Syria is now under unprecedented international -- mostly American and French -- globally backed pressure.... Whatever the case may be, the Syrians will pay for [Hariri's] assassination even if they weren't actually behind it. Hariri's elimination pulled the rug from under the [Syrians'] key claim justifying the continuation of their presence in Lebanon -- a presence supposed to guarantee continued stability and the upholding of security in that country."

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